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Foxross Straits - Airfield Construction - Merchant Shipping
(Info dates - May and June 1955)

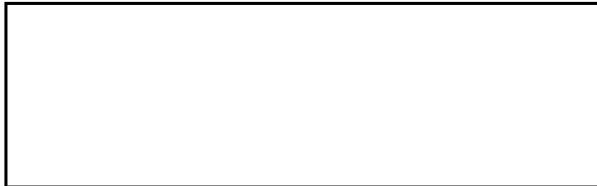
The apparent completion of runway surfacing at two and probably three new coastal airfields in the Formosa Straits area now permits the Chinese Communists to conduct at least limited air operations along the entire coast between Canton and Shanghai, and substantially increases the immediate danger of hostilities in the Straits.

Field interpretation of aerial photography of 6 June indicates that the runway at Langtiao has been completely paved and that POL supplies are already on the airfield.^{1/} The Swatow Northeast runway was reportedly completed in late May, while the runway at Hantai is probably already surfaced or will be within a few days.^{2/} There is also evidence from aerial reconnaissance that a 2,000 ton tanker, under naval escort, was in the Swatow area in early June, presumably with POL supplies for the new airfield, suggesting an intention to make the field operational at an early date.^{3/}

Completion of these airfields significantly increases Chinese Communist capabilities to neutralize or to invade the offshore islands, and the extremely rapid rate of construction indicates a high degree of urgency. Even if direct action against the islands is not their immediate intention, it is anticipated that the Chinese Communists will attempt to move shipping into and possibly through the Formosa Straits under cover of aircraft operating from the new airfields, just as they expanded regular coastal shipping operations southward to Nanchow after the Nationalists evacuated the Taichew and Lushao airfield came into operation. If the Nationalists continue their present efforts to intercept Communist coastal shipping, it seems likely that there will be a mounting number of clashes between Communist and Nationalist Air and Naval forces. Moreover, under these circumstances, the Nationalists would bear the responsibility for offensive action, thus enabling the Communists to exploit the propaganda theme that they were acting in self defense, and to bring increased pressure for restraint by the US of Nationalist air and sea operations.

Report

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Sources:

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